

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
305 EAST MAIN STREET
DURHAM, NC 27701
PHONE: (919) 682-5511**



**“Surprising Growth”
A sermon by Sam Miglarese**

**11th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)
June 17, 2018
2 Corinthians 5:6-10, Mark 4:26-34**

Paul the Apostle was a great missionary—on his journeys he experienced dangers and setbacks. He had every good reason to be discouraged. He was shipwrecked, he was imprisoned, he was rejected in his preaching and teaching, and yet he speaks today with full confidence: “we are confident. I repeat I am full of confidence because we walk not by sight but by faith.”

The word of God in the prophecy of Ezekiel and Jesus in his parables elucidate through graphic images of nature the power of God at work in our lives. We are assured that God is faithful to his promises. We are called to trust the future:

- Ezekiel—The Lord says “I will take a tender shoot and plant it high and it will become...” Do not have to be forestry major to know tender shoots do not survive very long on high mountains...
- In the same way, Jesus struggles to lay out in images and metaphors the mystery and power of the Kingdom at work. The Kingdom of God is like, is something like a farmer who scatters seeds, like a mustard seed—in each instance the Kingdom’s power is hidden and quiet at work resulting in

surprising transformations. The mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds yet one day it is a magnificent bush. The leaven is tiny and raises the entire mass of dough..... Forgiveness in the Kingdom is like the prodigal son, service in the kingdom is like the Good Samaritan, etc.

The question is: Do we really believe in God's power to make things happen with surprising, unexpected growth. Is the Kingdom at work in our lives?

The heart of the proclamation of Jesus that "the kingdom is at hand" lies not just in his preaching/storytelling, but primarily in his life laid down for others. It is the self-sacrificial death of Jesus that is the most radical proclamation of the Kingdom's presence NOW--but NOT YET fully.

The commitment of the Christian is to continue to do the same: to make the kingdom a reality here & now (even when to many it appears this is hell-on-earth, not heaven-on-earth). We do what Jesus did by proclaiming God's Reign somewhat by what we say but mostly by how we live—i.e., self-sacrificially for the sake of others.

So what that looks like depends on the unique circumstances in which each believer finds him/herself:

- Where and how do we invest our treasure (time/talent/\$\$) in ways that are self-sacrificial now and in the future.
- How can we reach out a helping hand to the "neighbor" that is struggling and feels utterly alone in a moment of darkness? Mental health issues and for many of us this is a day to celebrate yet viewing the wrenching scenes of a child pulled from her Father's arms is heartbreaking. How to be a good neighbor with new laws that cause immigrant family's unnecessary suffering.

- When are we called to stand up and be counted by protesting an injustice...even though it may cost us our popularity, our place at work and our livelihood?
- How often must we forgive someone who has “sinned against us” by slander, by false accusations, by lies especially when that forgiveness is not in response to an apology or any sign of changed intent?
- Annie Dillard said, “How we spend our days, is of course, how we spend our lives” which translates for most of us into a focus on the everyday “domestic” life of self-sacrifice as spouse, parent, son/daughter. That’s where the rubber hits the road for most of us, most of the time. To what extent do we live our everyday lives in such a way that we embody Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom to those we live with here & now every day?

The believer is one who can do these little (and on rare occasions big) things as Jesus would do them, and hold firm (in the face of so much evidence to the contrary) to the conviction that this is God’s power at work in us, transforming this broken world as surely as the mustard seed is transformed into a huge bush. Without the conviction of faith we walk in darkness not in the light (2 Corinthians).

Because sermons are meant to be preached and are therefore prepared with the emphasis on verbal presentation (i.e., are written for the ear), the written accounts occasionally deviate from proper and generally accepted principles of grammar and punctuation. Most often, these deviations are not mistakes per se, but are indicative of an attempt to aid the listener in the delivery of the sermon.

© FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH 2018. FOR PERSONAL AND EDUCATIONAL USE ONLY.